

This Week in Congress

May 15, 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

House Approves 2007 Defense Authorization Bill

This week, the House approved the annual policy and funding blueprint for the Department of Defense. The 2007 National Defense Authorization Act authorizes funding to enhance benefits for military personnel and support operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Global War on Terrorism.

Our military men and women are our most valuable resource. Protecting them during this war and providing for them after their service is our responsibility. This legislation focuses on personnel benefits, force protection measures and the needs of our military.

Highlights of this bill include:

- Provides a 2.7 percent pay raise for members of the armed forces.
- Blocks the Administration's proposed increases in TRICARE enrollment fees and deductibles for military retirees under 65.
- Extends TRICARE benefits to all members of the Selected Reserve.
- Ensures that American troops have the protective equipment they need, including up-armored Humvees, gunner protection kits, state-of-the-art body armor, radio signal jamming devices and surveillance aircraft to counter improvised explosive devices.
- Recommends an increase of 30,000 Army and 5,000 Marine Corps active duty personnel to sustain our missions.
- Increases the Army National Guard by 17,100 over the Administration's request, authorizing a total end strength of 350,000.

Tax Legislation Passes Congress

Wednesday brought final passage of the Tax Relief Extension Reconciliation Act. This will continue several key tax changes enacted in recent years that were set to expire. The Tax Relief Extension Reconciliation Act passed with broad Republican and Democrat support and now awaits the President's signature.

Highlights of this legislation include:

- Extension of the current Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) exemption levels through 2006 and allowing nonrefundable personal tax credits to offset the AMT, shielding millions of middle-income taxpayers. The new exemption levels for 2006 are \$62,550 for joint filers and \$42,500 for single filers.
- Extension of the reduced tax rate on capital gains and dividend income through 2010.
- Extension of the increased small business expensing at \$100,000 through 2009.

Meeting with Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts

I joined a small group of Members of Congress in meeting Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. this week for a discussion on the role of the courts and the relationship between Congress and the Judiciary branch. Roberts was sworn in as the 17th Chief Justice of the United States in September after the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

Hearing from Agricultural Producers in Colorado and Texas

At the beginning of the week, I was in Colorado and Texas for another round of hearings to obtain input in developing the 2007 Farm Bill. Ten Members of the Committee and at least 100 members of the community attended the hearing in Greeley, Colorado, and heard from witnesses about a variety of farm policy issues, including commodity programs, farm economy, land prices, rural development, and conservation. Kansas interests were represented by Jeff Deeds, a wheat, corn, sunflower, pinto bean, soybean and grain sorghum producer from Goodland. He gave an accurate and important account of the situation many farmers in western Kansas are facing. He focused his testimony on the poor performance of crop insurance programs during years of sustained droughts.

On Tuesday, the Committee continued on to San Angelo, Texas, for a hearing at Angelo State University. A large turnout of more than 200 local producers, agribusiness leaders, and agriculture officials attended the hearing, as well a dozen Members of the Agriculture Committee. Witnesses spoke about a number of issues, including commodity programs, payment limits, conservation, livestock, and marketing issues. The stop in Texas marked the sixth hearing our Committee has held, which is the halfway point as the Chairman and Ranking Member intend to hold about a dozen farm bill hearings across the country. In addition, the Agriculture Committee is holding several hearings in Washington, D.C., before beginning the farm bill debate early next year.

Discussing the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery with VA Under Secretary

I met with William Tuerk, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), this week to discuss the proposed Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery. The need for a veterans' cemetery in this area is great as Fort Riley's post cemetery approaches capacity and as the community's population increases due to growth at the Fort. The Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery has been in the works for several years and I encouraged the VA to swiftly move this project forward in order to provide a proper place of burial for area veterans.

The cemetery will be located west of the Manhattan Regional Airport and will encompass a total of 90 acres, including space for about 10,000 burial sites. This will be the fourth State Veterans Cemetery in Kansas. Others are located in Fort Dodge, WaKeeney and Winfield. These cemeteries are state-operated, and design and construction costs are paid for by the VA. I am a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Hosting an Agriculture Forum during the 3i Show in Great Bend

On Friday and Saturday, I joined farmers, ranchers and many other Kansans at the 52nd annual 3i - irrigation, implements, industry - Show in Great Bend. The 3i Show is hosted by the Western Kansas Manufacturers Association. This was my tenth year attending the show.

During the event, I hosted an agriculture forum that was broadcast live by KBUF radio of Garden City. John Jenkinson, Farm Director at KBUF, served as moderator. The topics of discussion centered on the current environment of the agriculture industry, including the upcoming farm bill, world trade, energy prices and alternative energy sources. I was also pleased to have a Chicago Tribune reporter join me for the event and for a tour around the 3i Show. It gave me the opportunity to tell our story of what is going on in Kansas agriculture to an urban audience.

Speaking to the 2006 Graduating Class of Trego High School

On Sunday, I delivered the commencement address to the 2006 graduating class of Trego High School in WaKeeney. I thanked the parents and educators for helping these graduates reach this important point in their lives and visited with the class of 47 about leading a life of excellence, character and service. For full text of my speech, visit: http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/sp051406TregoHSCommencementAddress.html

Participating in 93rd McPherson All Schools Day Parade

This week, McPherson continued its long standing tradition of holding a parade on the second Friday in May. This has been an annual community event since 1917. Along with students from area schools, I rode down Main Street as a part of the "Celebrate Our Sounds of Music" themed parade. The parade was only part of a full week of events celebrating McPherson County students and the schools they attend.

Attending Hays High School Chamber Singers Dinner Show

On Friday, I attended the 17th annual Hays High School Dinner Show - "Hooray for Hollywood" - hosted by the Chamber Singers. The director is Elise Peterson and the group is accompanied by my wife, Robba. It was an enjoyable evening of dinner and entertainment and I was impressed by the musical abilities of our students in northwest Kansas.

In the Office

Hallie Kretsinger of Emporia was in my office this week to describe how Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has affected her life and to advocate for more research funding. Ric Baird of Topeka and Dave Sanderson of Salina were in to visit about the importance of Medicare patients having access to physical therapists. Valissa Smith Marston of Westwood Hills and Yvonne Miller and Renee Austin of Kansas City were in with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to explain the continued need for research funding and to inform me about new technologies that are being developed to help those who are currently living with this disease.

Representatives of the Kansas Association of Home Builders were in to discuss regulatory reform for Government Sponsored Enterprises, regulation of storm water discharges, federal tax reform, and a number of other important housing issues. The First District has the highest home ownership rate in Kansas and I appreciate their input. In with the group from Wichita were Tom Baalman, Jim Goentzel, Leon and Treva Greaser, Wesley Galyon, Carl Harris, Mitch Mitchell, Vern Klassen, Bob Muzzy, Elton Parsons, Steve Robl and Tim Shigley. Also with the group

were Gary Pashman of Topeka, Mark and Deborah McKenna of Rose Hill, Richard Standrich of Derby and Chris Wilson of Wamego.

In representing the Transportation, Elevator and Grain Merchants Association was Chuck Elsea of Salina to talk about the association's priorities regarding the next farm bill and to give an account of current transportation issues facing the group's members. Dr. Joshua Freeman of Kansas City; Beth Loney, medical student, of Eudora; Dr. Eleanor Lisbon of Kansas City; Dr. Brian Holmes of Abilene; Dr. Rick Kellerman of Wichita; and Dr. Robert Moser of Tribune were in representing the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians to discuss Health Information Technology and improving rural veterans' access to health care. Dr. Moser was recently named the Kansas Family Physician of the Year.

Carolyn Henry and Ralph Rojas of Garden City and Merle Henry of Holcomb were in to provide an update on American Red Cross activities in Kansas. The American Red Cross is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. I commend this organization for serving Kansans, Americans and our international neighbors for all of these years. Robert Nattier of Newton and Dennis Blick of Wichita were in to talk about CoBank's business in Kansas. CoBank reaches roughly 250 communities in the state. Members of the Kansas Beer Wholesalers came in to voice their opposition to the death tax. In with the group were Terry Dow of Manhattan, Casey Mussatto of Osage City, Kelly Frakes of Salina, Bob Bush and Bill Goodlatte of Hutchinson, Neal Whitaker of Auburn, Steve Beykirch of Frontenec, and Matt Strathmaa of Topeka. I have sponsored legislation to fully repeal this unjust tax. The group also updated me on their industry's efforts to prevent drunk driving and keep alcohol away from minors.

Kansas Secretary of Revenue Joan Wagon was in my office to give me an update on the Multistate Tax Commission. Kansas, along with 44 other states and territories, works to preserve state tax sovereignty and improve the effectiveness of state tax systems. Secretary Wagon shared how several pieces of federal legislation may affect revenue coming into the

state of Kansas.

Several people stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol, including Jan Thoben of Jetmore, John Thoben and Larissa Grodeski of Olathe, Darryl Serpan of Hutchinson, Vicky Foos of LaCrosse, and Lisa Foos of Wichita. Brent Rupert and Shelly Flores of Salina were in with their son, Johnathon Flores, as was Kim Klozenbucher of LaCrosse with his children, Kolin, Chase and Kacee.

Very truly yours,

Jerry